



# Education for citizenship in South Australian public schools: A pilot study of senior leader and teacher perceptions

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DOI:

[10.1080/09585176.2016.1184579](https://doi.org/10.1080/09585176.2016.1184579)

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*Citation for published version (Harvard):*

Peterson, A & Bentley, B 2017, 'Education for citizenship in South Australian public schools: A pilot study of senior leader and teacher perceptions', *The Curriculum Journal*, vol. 28, no. 1, pp. 105.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09585176.2016.1184579>

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checked for eligibility: 14/12/2018

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**Education for citizenship in South Australian public schools: A pilot study of senior  
leader and teacher perceptions**

## **Abstract**

Preparing students for informed and active citizenship is a core goal of education and schooling in Australia. The ways schools educate and prepare young Australians for citizenship involves a range of processes and initiatives central to the work of schools, including school ethos, mission, extra-curricular activities and community-based participation. With regard to the formal curriculum, the recent introduction and implementation of the first ever Federal Australian curriculum includes provision for a new subject – Civics and Citizenship. Research evidence from other nations suggests that schools understand, approach and enact education for citizenship in a multitude of ways, yet how Australian schools construct this aspect of their work is currently under-researched. In this context, and drawing on data from interviews with school leaders and teachers of year six-eight (11-14 year olds) students in a small sample of South Australian primary and secondary schools, we explore perceptions and current approaches to education for citizenship. Our findings suggest (i) that while school leaders and teachers value education for citizenship, they do so for different reasons; (ii) that schools place values as central to education for citizenship; and, (iii) that community involvement is typically understood as occurring *within* rather than *beyond* the school.

## **Key Words**

Education for citizenship, civics and citizenship, values, active citizenship, community

## **Introduction**

Formal curricular requirements in Australia have been in a state of continual discussion and change for the last 10 years as the nation moved away from State/Territory-based curricular provisions to the first ever national Australian Curriculum. The recently introduced Australian Curriculum included provision for a new subject – *Civics and Citizenship* – to be compulsory for Years 3-8 (7 to 14 year olds) as part of the Humanities and Social Sciences learning area. Changes introduced late in 2015 – led by the Liberal-led Coalition Federal and agreed by State/Territory education ministers – have resulted in a return to a combined Humanities and Social Sciences curriculum until Year 6 (11-12 year olds) and separate subject disciplines (History, Geography, Economics and Business, and

Civics and Citizenship) from Year 7 (12-13 year olds). The development of a specific curriculum subject for *Civics and Citizenship* in Australia has mirrored policy interest in a number of other jurisdictions over the last fifteen years that have similarly introduced the direct teaching of education for citizenship into their curricula for schools (see, Arthur, Davies and Hahn, 2008). The new subject represents a significant step in the teaching of civics and citizenship in Australia. Yet, preparing young people for informed, responsible and active citizenship has long been a goal of education and schooling in Australia – one which was reaffirmed by the 1989 *Hobart Declaration on Schooling*, the 1999 *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century* and, most recently, by the 2008 *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*. In the latter, the second of two goals for Australian education includes the commitment that ‘all young Australians become... active and informed citizens’ (MCEETYA, 2008: 9).

Civics and Citizenship is not being introduced in a vacuum, but rather is likely to be shaped by schools’ existing perceptions, processes and practices. For this reason, if we are to understand how schools are planning their implementation of Civics and Citizenship – particularly in a period when curriculum content and requirements have been subject to frequent adjustments - we must start by seeking to understand their existing work, an area currently under-researched. While data provided from the National Assessment Program – Civics and Citizenship (see, for example, ACARA, 2011) provides an insight into current levels of knowledge and understanding held by young Australians, there is little recent empirical research about the ways in which school leaders and teachers currently perceive their role in preparing students for informed, active and responsible citizenship – nor indeed about how these perceptions may differ between different schools. This gap is not insignificant given the introduction of the new subject and the requirements on schools to take account of new – and changing – curricular requirements in relation to their existing work. Understanding how schools and teachers view their role as civic educators is important given that ‘no matter how tightly the state seeks to prescribe educational practice to conform with the educational settlement, there is always ‘wiggle room’ for educators...’ (Reid, Gill and Sears, 2010: 5) and that how teachers understand citizenship will play a significant role in shaping how they teach it and how students experience this teaching (Pajares, 1992). Moreover, while no curriculum subject is without contestation regarding aims and content, evidence from both Australia (Gill and Reid, 1999; Henderson, 2010; Print, 2008, 2015; Reid and Gill, 2010) and elsewhere (Crick, 2003; Boyte, 2003; Bickmore, 2014) highlights that

there are particular tensions involved in creating education for citizenship curriculum – tensions which we seek to highlight throughout our analysis.

In seeking to start addressing this gap, the study reported here draws on qualitative interview data which investigated the *perceptions* and *understandings* of education for citizenship held by school leaders and teachers in a small sample of schools in South Australia. Our research was interested in three specific research questions: First, what existing practices and processes does our sample of schools employ to support and develop students' citizenship knowledge, skills, and dispositions? Second, what plans are in place in these schools for the implementation of the Australian Curriculum for *Civics and Citizenship*? Third, what do schools perceive to be the main barriers and challenges to teaching about and for citizenship, including implementing the new Australian Curriculum for *Civics and Citizenship*? Following this introduction, the paper comprises four main sections. In the first we establish the theoretical frameworks that shape current discourse on education for citizenship, and which underpin the basis of our research. In the second, the research questions and methods are explained. In the third, we present the findings of our research, while in the fourth we consider several implications raised by our research.

Before proceeding to this analysis an initial and brief comment regarding the recent historical context is worth noting. While there has been some interest in education for citizenship – the term we use here to include both the curricular subject and the wider aim of education and schooling – over the last twenty-five years in Australia, the purpose, coherence and impact of initiatives in Australia have been rather mixed. A Senate Committee enquiry on *Education for Active Citizenship* (SSCEET, 1989) in the late-1980s and the subsequent publication of the *Whereas the People: Civics and Citizenship Education in Australia* (CEG, 1994) report by the Civics Expert Group (CEG) both ‘painted a bleak picture’ of the levels of political understanding and engagement among young Australians (Hughes, Print and Sears, 2010: 297; see, also Kennedy, Watts and McDonald, 1993; Print, 1995a; Print, 1995b). The Federally-funded *Discovering Democracy* program enacted in response represented an important intervention in developing teaching materials for schools, but was undermined by the ‘great variation... found in both the depth and breadth of implementation of the program’ (ECG, 1999: 7; see also, Robinson and Parkin, 1997; Gill and Reid, 1999; Hughes, Print and Sears, 2010). This lack of widespread impact on the depth and quality of education for citizenship was reaffirmed in the 2006 report of the triennial *National Assessment Program* –

*Civics and Citizenship* which made clear that students' 'level of knowledge and understanding of civics and citizenship education [was] less than was expected by a range of experts in the field' (Mellor, 2007). Indeed, it could be argued that the Australian experience conforms to the characterisation of education for citizenship cited across a range of jurisdictions of bold intentions at a policy and curricular level that frequently fail to translate into widespread effective practice in schools (Kerr, 1999; Hughes, Print and Sears, 2010).

### **Conceptualising Education for citizenship in Australian schools**

While the research reported here was initially prompted by the imminent implementation of Civics and Citizenship, our interest was underpinned by two key recognitions. First, that education for citizenship is *more than a subject* (Crick, in DfEE, 1999) and incorporates a wide range of processes and activities within schools that support the goal of producing informed, responsible and active citizens. Such processes and activities include, but are not limited to, the ethos and values of the school, the taught curriculum, cross-curricular connections, extra-curricular activities, connections to – and experiences within – the community, and student voice. Second, that education for citizenship is a contested concept, one which is open to a range of interpretations, meaning that creating curriculum is itself a political exercise and necessarily engages actors – either explicitly or implicitly – in interpreting what it means to be a citizen (Gill and Reid, 1999; Crick, 2003; Reid and Gill, 2010). The very nature of education for citizenship (its political and social processes and ends, as well as the diffuse and multifaceted ways it can be structured and implemented), then, means that practice will be informed and shaped by how the concept of citizenship is characterised. In other words, to *comprehend* education for citizenship in schools we must first know something about how school leaders and teachers understand the concepts of citizenship and education for citizenship, including how understandings are similar and different between individuals and/or schools.

Though there has been a burgeoning of interest and research literature in the field of education for citizenship over the last twenty-five years, its boundaries remain both wide and blurred. In part this owes to the fact that education for citizenship has been related to, and informed by, a range of other interests, including political education, global learning, human rights education, education for sustainability, peace education, service learning, multi-/inter-cultural education, values education, and character education. Furthermore, the political and

social nature of education for citizenship permits a range of perspectives which shape understandings of citizenship, including liberalism (Macedo, 1990; Mulhall, 1998), communitarianism (Arthur, 2000), civic republicanism (Peterson, 2011), post-colonialism (Wainaina, Arnot and Chege, 2011; Andreotti and de Souza, 2012), multiculturalism (Kiwan, 2008), and cosmopolitanism (Osler, 2008; Merry and de Ruyter, 2011). In addition, education for citizenship can be focused on multifarious ends, including combatting political apathy, increasing knowledge and understanding of the political system, providing opportunity for social action within communities, developing awareness of cultural diversity and building social cohesion, promoting values, cultivating critical thinking, and enhancing global learning.

The different intentions, perspectives and ends of education for citizenship mean that curricular aims, purpose and content can be approached and shaped by a myriad of perspectives. In his philosophical analysis of the aims of education for citizenship, McLaughlin (2000) proposes a continuum upon which accounts – as well as curricular foci – can be located. In this, McLaughlin (2000: 550; emphasis in original) demarcates between minimal and maximal accounts of citizenship, and therefore citizenship education, as occupying the respective ends of the spectrum. Conceptions are located according to how they conceive four key elements of citizenship: the ‘*identity*’ conferred, the ‘*virtues*’ required, the ‘*extent of political involvement*’ expected, and the ‘*social prerequisites*’ integral to the conception. To consider conceptions on a spectrum reminds us that standpoints on education for citizenship are complex and multifaceted.

With this complexity in mind, it is worth noting that many of the civic education programmes and initiatives that have developed in the last two decades in a number of Western democracies have sought to engender not simply knowledge of the respective political systems and an understanding and respect for rights, but active and participatory forms of citizenship that recognises the existence of citizen responsibilities and which would be located toward the maximal end of McLaughlin’s spectrum. This has involved a bringing together of civics knowledge with service learning, underpinned by the commitment that it is not enough to know what it means to be a citizen – one has to put this knowledge into action in a responsible way as a member of a political community (Boyte, 2003). A number of commentators have suggested that the prevalence of participatory approaches to education for citizenship curricular has been underpinned by civic republican approaches (Crick, 2003;

Annette, 2008; Peterson, 2011; Hughes, Print and Sears, 2010). That is, that formal curriculums have been shaped by the civic republican understanding of *citizenship as practice*, which incorporates a commitment to four, inter-related elements. First, that citizens possess and should recognise certain *civic obligations*; second, that citizens must develop an awareness of *the common good*, which exists over and above their private self-interests; third, that citizens must possess and act in accordance with *civic virtue*; and fourth, that civic engagement in democracy should incorporate a *deliberative* aspect (Peterson, 2011).

However, while it is one thing to claim that education for citizenship should seek to develop “active citizens”, it is another to elicit the scope and form of such activity. In their analysis of educating for democracy, Westheimer and Kahne (2004: 240) set out a three-strand typology of responses to the question “what kind of citizen?”. According to this classification the *personally responsible citizen* is informed, responsible, law-abiding and willing to volunteer in a crisis. The *participatory citizen* represents an ‘active member of community organizations’ who supports and plays a part in leading concerted collective efforts to improve their communities. The *justice-oriented citizen* adopts a critical stance to structural inequalities and processes and seeks to bring about change. Notably, while each formulation of the citizen involves some form of participation, the extent and nature of this participation differs. Indeed, evidence from other jurisdictions points to the highly contested nature of active and informed citizenship, as well as to the different ways that schools approach and provide for students’ citizenship learning (see, for example, Benton et al., 2008; Pye et al., 2009; Durrant et al, 2012; Vickers and Kumar, 2015).

This brief overview reminds us that perspectives matter; that is, how school leaders and teachers understand citizenship is likely to shape the aims, purpose and form of education for citizenship that they seek to provide – including their choices over the actual curriculum structures and interventions enacted within their schools and classrooms. Significantly, however, Kerr and Cleaver (2004: 18) point out that discourse concerning the meaning of these contested concepts is ‘led primarily by commentators and academics... with little input or involvement from practitioners’ and that ‘the approaches that are both advocated and built in practice appear to remain fluid, flexible and situation-specific’. The importance of this recognition is heightened when we reflect that the majority of teachers in Australian schools may have received little specialist pre-service education or in-service professional development in the field of education for citizenship. Such a reflection is not insignificant



given evidence available in other nations that education for citizenship suffers problems of understanding, definition and implementation where there has been a lack of specialist education, training and development (see, for example, OfSTED 2009, 2013).

### **Research Focus and Methods**

The purpose of the research presented here was to investigate the perceptions and understandings of education for citizenship held by school leaders and teachers in a small sample of schools (n=4) in South Australia. Our research was interested in three specific research questions:

- what existing practices and processes do our sample of schools employ to support and develop students' citizenship knowledge, skills, and dispositions (RQ1)?
- what plans are in place in these schools for the implementation of the Australian Curriculum for *Civics and Citizenship* (RQ2)? and,
- what do school leaders and teachers perceive to be the main barriers and challenges to teaching about and for citizenship, including implementing the new Australian Curriculum for *Civics and Citizenship* (RQ3)?

As we were interested in the *actual* existing practices of schools and the perceptions and understandings held by school leaders and teachers within those schools, and owing to the study's pilot and exploratory nature, we took an opportunity sample of schools. In February 2015 data were collected from the four schools. While all the schools were co-educational public schools, in trying to include schools of different types we specifically contacted schools from different locations within South Australia: School A is a mid-size primary school located in the northern suburbs of Adelaide; School B is a small primary school located in the western suburbs of Adelaide; School C is a large primary school in the eastern suburbs of Adelaide; and School D is a small high school located in a country town over 200km from Adelaide. Two semi-structured interviews were held in each school: one with school leaders and one with school teachers responsible for teaching Civics and Citizenship education to students in either Year 6 (11-12 years of age) and 7 (12-13 years of age) in the three primary schools or Year 8 (13-14 years of age) in the secondary school. In the three primary schools the interviews were conducted in person, while for the country secondary school the interviews were conducted by telephone owing to distance. Our focus on Year's 6

to 8 was deliberate. It is worth noting here that South Australia remains the only Australian State or Territory in which secondary schooling commences at year 8 rather than year 7.

At the time the data were collected the Civics and Citizenship curriculum was to be compulsory between Years 3 and 8 and it was in the Year 6 to 8 age-range that students were to be expected to engage with more developed conceptual understanding (democratic political systems, rights and justice, Australia as a secular state and multi-faith nation, active citizenship, for example) as well as citizenship-related skills (critically analysing information and sources, engaging in democratic processes and with multiple perspectives, for example). This expectation remains, though changes to curriculum enacted since our data were collected have meant that Civics and Citizenship will now be taught from Year 7 with national policy shifting back to a combined humanities and social sciences curriculum – including some Civics and Citizenship-related themes from Foundation (five to six years of age) to Year 6 (eleven to twelve year olds). While our data were collected before the changes made to the curriculum at the end of 2015, in our analysis we point to the implications of our findings for the implementation and enactment of the newly revised curriculum.

Participation in the research was voluntary and each school was contacted prior to data collection to ensure that they understood the research strategy and how any data would be used. It was made explicit to schools that responses would remain anonymous, and that they could withdraw their involvement at any stage of the research process. The project proposal and research methods were approved by the researchers' institutional Human Research Ethics committee.

The interviews were semi-structured, enabling a common focus throughout all interviews while enabling researchers and respondents to follow-up relevant and appropriate responses within the interviews. The same prompt scripts were used in the interviews with school leaders and teachers, with the questions framed to be inclusive of respondents' respective positions within the school/s. Given our focus, the prompt questions were divided into two sections. The first focused on understandings of and approaches to education for citizenship as a general aim of education and schooling, while the second concentrated on perceptions of the new Civics and Citizenship subject. The former included questions such as *how important do you feel it is that schools and teachers prepare students for active and responsible citizenship and can you explain your answer?*, and *Can you provide an indication of the*

*school's current practices in relation to education for citizenship in the areas of curriculum, school ethos, culture and environment, classroom teaching and learning practices, school programs and policies, and community partnerships and links? The latter included questions such as What planning and professional development have you undertaken in relation to the new subject – Civics and Citizenship?, What elements of your current practice in relation to education for citizenship have you planned or are you planning to change in order to fulfil the requirements of the new Civics and Citizenship curriculum?, In the context of your school, what barriers and challenges are there to introducing and implementing the new subject?, and Are there any identifiable professional development needs that you feel are important in the context of your school that would support the introduction and implementation of the new curriculum subject – Civics and Citizenship?*

Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and then analysed thematically. The responses for each interview were transcribed and key topics emerging grouped under similar headings and themes. In this sense an 'open coding system' (Strauss and Corbin 1990) was developed to identify themes and areas of particular interest, concern or ambiguity (Pigeon and Harwood 1997). Since the research is exploratory, the themes devised during the initial analysis took the form of 'categories' consisting of a number of linked responses between participants (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Categories were identified initially based on issues relating to the previous literature review, with these themes revised and added to during the analysis (for this reason the next section is structured around these themes rather than the research questions themselves). It is intended that the themes which have emerged from the present data will help to inform coding for our future, larger-scale research on education for citizenship in Australian schools.

Owing to the decisions made in regard to the research methods and sampling, there are two particular limitations of our research design which it is necessary to note. First, in seeking to explore senior leaders' and teachers' perceptions, our research is concerned with, and is dependent on, self-reporting. Though we have no reason to doubt the sincerity of the views expressed and claims made, we are not in a position to verify these through observation of practice. Second, we are cognisant that the sample size prohibits the extent to which we can generalise our findings. In particular, it is likely that the one country secondary school in our sample is untypical of secondary schools, particularly those within an urban environment.

Nevertheless, the perceptions of school leaders and teachers reported here do provide insights which will be of interest to others and which provide a basis to stimulate further research.

## **Findings**

As reported in the last section, our interview data were analysed thematically as we were interested in emerging themes and issues that arose from the perceptions of the school leaders and teachers within our sample. While our discussions with schools were wide ranging, our analysis drew out three important themes: education for citizenship as core to education and schooling, current approaches to education for citizenship, and plans for implementing Civics and Citizenship.

### *Education for citizenship as core to education and schooling*

For all of our respondents, education for citizenship is perceived as central to education and schooling. That this is so reinforces the second goal of the Melbourne Declaration cited above, which a number of our participants mentioned explicitly in our interviews. Notably, however, there were some differences concerning how this importance was justified by school leaders and teachers. For school leaders, the importance of educating for citizenship lay in preparing students for the changing nature of Australian society:

I think it is one of the most imperative things that we've got to look at because the social change that's happening around us at the moment is ... going to really change the picture of what Australia is like in the future... it is really important that we prepare kids for what, for their part in the world... and how they're going to represent Australia... (School A).

Similarly:

I think it's one of the most critical things in schools, in primary school especially, and it's something that I've always... pushed, especially in the older year levels... I guess in a school like ours, we are a community school, we're small... and we rely heavily on the community... so it's really important that the kids actually drive that as well (School B).

In their comments school leaders referenced visions of more maximal conceptions of citizenship, with students encouraged and expected to view themselves as active and participative members of their communities. Such references also bore connections with Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) 'participative citizen'.

One of the school leaders we spoke with at School D echoed this sense of participative citizenship, but questioned the value of teaching Civics and Citizenship as a discrete subject:

I don't know that the answer is to make it part of the structured curriculum. I think... you still need to make sure that it's covered and that it's done, but I don't know that making kids sit down with a booklet or, you know, a textbook is the way to go, because I think we need to present citizenship in a positive light, and an involvement in your community and being part of your community in a responsible way is definitely the way to go.

In contrast, while teachers we spoke with agreed that educating for citizenship was a key aspect of schooling, they generally framed this as responding to a *gap* in students' current understanding, commitment and behaviour – emphasising the need for students to develop *personally responsible* citizenship alongside participation. In fact, as the following extracts highlight, this was the case with *all* of the teachers with whom we spoke:

Unfortunately some of our kids don't get taught that at home, so it's really important that, especially in our schools, that they understand that this is what it's like to be an active person, but also having their say.  
(School A)

I think there are definitely certain aspects that are very important for students to learn, especially because you wonder when are they going to learn them... if you compare children's lives today to what they were 20 or 30 years ago, the upbringing is quite different, so kids aren't getting this sort of information... of how to be a good citizen at home, and so it is something that's really important we need to teach here (School B).

It's very important because I think that our children are not giving back to the community as much as they should... They're engrossed in their own lives that I think they need to know that there's a wider world out there (School C).

Once upon a time... everybody was involved in all the community activities, and so you just got all that stuff because you were involved in sport and church and... different things, but there's a group of young people now who aren't actually involved, so I guess... schools do what they do best and fill the gaps (School D).

When asked *what* students learn from education for citizenship the responses were common across our sample. First, (considered in more detail below) schools saw education for citizenship as a way of learning values. Second, all of our respondents cited understanding of key political and social knowledge, including the Australian political and legal systems and the multicultural nature of Australian society alongside the development of core skills, including critical thinking, communicating with others, teamwork, and leadership.

### *Current approaches to education for citizenship*

It was clear from our conversations that participants identified a range of procedures within schools as contributing to preparing students for citizenship. This included the formal curriculum (to which we return below), and also a variety of processes and events within the wider life of the school. Of the processes presently employed, all of our respondents placed especial emphasis on school values, and this was expressed strongly by the school leaders in particular. In three of the schools the values to be prioritised had been revised in recent years using a process of consultation that included staff, governors, parents and the students. A senior leader at School C explained that their three school values:

were determined a few years ago, because we had eight or nine values that nobody could remember, so we went through a significant thing in terms of working with the teachers, students, and also our Governing Council. We put our surveys into the community, and so forth, to get opinions back, and then there was a community vote as well, so they were determined through that.

A similar approach has been adopted by School B in their reconsideration of school values, which was prompted by the incoming Principal questioning the extent to which the previous values were actually immersed within the school. For these schools values are not merely a list that appears on the school website or on corridor and classroom walls. Rather, they are active principles that were enacted, reinforced and celebrated in the daily life of the school – including through programs and activities related to education for citizenship. In three of the schools, dedicated classroom time (usually at the commencement of the school year) was set aside to focus on learning around the school values. The following response from the teacher at School B is illustrative:

I think one of the biggest things that we've... talked about, rather than just having them [school values], is actually making sure you're using the language so the kids are familiar with that language... so it's constantly, *Are you being respectful? What are you doing that's respectful or what aren't you doing that, what are you doing that's not being respectful?* So it's about making the kids aware that, *This is actually the way that we need to act. This is what we believe here.* So... that hopefully instils in them...and it becomes one of their beliefs later on, or one of their personal values, I guess, rather than just the school's.

All schools also reported that engagement with the community formed a large part of existing practice, though a mixed picture emerged regarding how this was constituted. For the sites in our sample, community engagement is predominantly located *within* the school, a finding to which we return in the discussion section which follows. Mirroring research evidence from other countries (see, for example, Benton, 2008; Bickmore, 2014; Hahn, 2015), it became clear that school leaders and teachers viewed the school itself as a community within which participation of students is encouraged and, indeed, is expected. When asked how the school supports students to engage within their community it was experiences within schools that predominated. Examples given included peer mentoring programs, recess and lunch duties, traffic duties, and supporting sports clubs for younger students. One senior leader (School B) also made it clear that it was not just the act that was important, but how this was framed:

So with our [year] 5/6/7s we make sure that they do certain programs around the school. So there's several things like your road monitors at the end of the day.

An example of that, when I first got to this school... they had road monitors but the kids got an excursion at the end of the year for doing that, and that was something that I actually took the excursion away, because I said to them, “that’s actually something, a part of your education and it’s that extracurricular stuff”. So getting that understanding, “I’m putting something out and not getting something back”.

A further theme that emerged in our discussions was the desire to engage with students in constructing elements of their education and schooling in a way that could support their participation in the decision-making process. While each of the four schools had some form of elected student representation committee, other mechanisms varied between the schools. In School C a code of conduct has been developed by students (overseen by teachers) to act as a guide for student behaviour within the school. The development of a co-constructed code of conduct was also cited by the school leaders in School B as a good example of students’ participation. Here learning about the democratic process was explicitly mentioned:

the democratic voice stuff happens a lot in the classrooms in our school here, so at the beginning of the year in the classroom they come up with... their own code of conduct, etc, and then, you know, go through their steps, and how they appropriately problem solve and things like that in the class.

Across our interviews we pushed further regarding opportunities for active citizenship, asking participants how students specifically engaged with communities *outside* of the school. Even here responses focused largely on examples of community members or groups visiting students *within* the school, as in the following example provided by a Principal:

A really strong relationship we have is with one of the volunteers, he had a daughter here at school, he’s a member of the RSL, Vietnam vet... he collaborates with our students and runs the Anzac Day and Remembrance Day services... he has a massive program, he works in with the children, and talks with them about qualities that, that make us Australian, that define who we are... It’s about...respecting, and valuing what we have as Australians, and that message is reinforced twice a year, and with a lot of historical perspective too



(School C).

It was only School D (a high school located in country South Australia) that reported multiple and consistent levels of student participation *out* in the community. Actions included community music events, catering at community events, community work experience, developing and maintaining a community garden, refurbishing a local buildings, student representatives on the local Youth Advisory Council and participation in fundraising activities outside of the school. Such activities were seen to have a dual benefit to the students and school alike:

So our involvement in the community has enabled students to feel a lot more comfortable dealing with people they don't know, and for a number of our students that's a huge step [and] has had a two-fold effect... it's enabled the kids to become a lot more comfortable talking to people that are not in their immediate circle of friends, or family, and also it's shed for the community a positive light on what happens at the school, and so it's been a... win/win situation.

(School D, Leader)

Our sample is too small to make any confident claims concerning the reasons why School D engaged in a significant range of activities outside of the school compared to the other sites. Two potential factors stand out – namely that the school is a country site and that it is a high school – but further research is needed to explore these factors in more depth in the Australian context.

#### *Plans for implementing Civics and Citizenship*

Before setting out how schools were planning to implement the new Civics and Citizenship curriculum, it is worth briefly stating that the interviews were conducted in early 2015. In the intervening period between the interviews and the time of writing, and on the request of ministers, changes have been made by to integrate the four Humanities and Social Sciences subject into a combined Humanities and Social Sciences curriculum for Years Foundation-6 (ages 5-12 years old), something which our respondents were not aware of at the time of our research.

While schools were at various stages of planning their implementation of the new subject, perhaps the key finding in this area was that the schools were confident in addressing its requirements and did not see this as requiring a significant change to their current practices. Responses such as ‘I don’t see that the new curriculum in that aspect is a major challenge’ (Leader, School B) and ‘I think it’s just adjusting what we’re already doing, and what that looks like in our programs’ (Leader, School A) were typical. In line with this, while schools mentioned some potential challenges to implementing the curriculum, these tended to focus on general, logistical issues such as the crowded curriculum and making connections with other subjects. Schools spoke about the support they would receive from the State-level Department curriculum implementation officers, as well as their general ability to respond to changing curricula and policy. As such, no significant barriers to implementation were raised, though the absence of professional development opportunities specifically related to Civics and Citizenship education was viewed as being disappointing, as in the following statement:

I don’t think you’ve ever got the complete knowledge of any of the curriculum Areas to be honest, so any sort of training and development that teachers can get is a bonus, because trying to do it on your own is, is not always the best model. So whether that’s even just... groups of people from different schools getting together to say, *Hey, this is what we’re doing, we’re moderating, we need to work together*, something like that, through to, *This is a good pedagogy to use when you’re teaching the Civics and Citizenship in your classrooms* (Teacher, School B).

Interestingly, given the policy change in late 2015 to return to combined curricular for Humanities and Social Sciences in Years Foundation-6, only in School B was there a clear commitment to teaching Civics and Citizenship as a discrete subject, and this was on the basis of the challenges of assessing individual subjects through an integrated approach:

I tend not to push too much that integrated model because I think once you start doing that, your assessment of the actual Standards and so forth at the end gets a bit blurry. So suddenly if you’re integrating something and... you’ve got three different things that you’re trying to assess with one piece of work, it gets a bit difficult (Leader, School B).

The general consensus across sites was that Civics and Citizenship was best approached through an integrated curriculum, though this was generally reported as being in connection with other Humanities and Social Science subjects (History, Geography, and Economics and Business) rather than across other curriculum subjects or, indeed, in connection with the three cross-curriculum priorities (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultures and Histories, Asia and Australia's Engagement with Asia, and Sustainability) or the seven general capabilities sitting across the curriculum (which include Intercultural Understanding, Ethical Understanding, and Personal and Social Capability).

This particular finding raises two possibilities. First, it is possible that for these schools the requirements of educating for citizenship, and in particular the new focus on Civics and Citizenship within the curriculum, really does not require significant change to current practice. Second, it may be that the schools are somewhat complacent and underestimate the curricular and pedagogical requirements of teaching Civics and Citizenship – something which was found in some schools across a large sample of sites following the statutory introduction of Citizenship education in England in 2002 (Keating et al., 2010). Again, deeper and wider research is needed in the Australian context to investigate which of these two possibilities is likely to be the case.

## **Discussion**

Our interviews raise a number of points of interest regarding how the school leaders and teachers understand and approach education for citizenship. Three inter-related factors are of particular significance in understanding schools' current perceptions and practice regarding education for citizenship. In raising these implications we are aware once again of the pilot nature of this study, but consider these outcomes as providing a basis for further research and discussion in this essential element of schooling in Australia, particularly at a time of curricular policy change.

The first, and unexpected finding, of our study which is potentially significant for further research is the extent to which the teacher respondents presented education for citizenship as responding to a particular *deficit* in students' political and social knowledge, skills and dispositions. In one sense this mind-set is not necessarily surprising. As suggested in the introduction, a real or perceived civic deficit has frequently formed the basis of justifications

of education for citizenship – both in Australia (CEG, 1994; see Print, 2008 for a more detailed discussion) and elsewhere (QCA, 1998; Bickmore, 2014). In this regard, while the teachers referenced the need for participative citizenship, they located this against a key emphasis on the capacities and elements of citizenship (correct conduct, following school rules, for example) synonymous with Kahne and Westheimer’s formulation of personally responsible citizenship. However, the focus on a civic deficit has not been the tone of the Melbourne Declaration nor of the various papers that have informed the new curriculum, which have presented a more positive justification of education for citizenship as a right and as necessary for a healthy democracy. That the teachers in our study tended toward a deficit model raises questions about the extent to which students’ own experiences *outside* of school (through sporting clubs, local organisations, religious groups, digital communities, for example) might be recognised to support their learning *within* the school (Osler and Starkey, 2003), something which international literature suggests is fundamental to effective and meaningful education for citizenship (Benton et al., 2008; Keating et al., 2010; Hahn, 2015).

The second factor that arises from our pilot research is the central place of values within schools’, and school leaders’ in particular, approaches to education for citizenship. In other jurisdictions – most notably England – while developing social and moral responsibility has often been a policy driver in the advent of citizenship curricular (for example, QCA, 1998), the expression of values within the formal curriculum and schools’ teaching has often been left implicit within, rather than central to, education for citizenship (see, for example, Keating et al. 2010). In contrast, for the schools in our sample, values were *core* to developing young citizens. Indeed, the strength of this was so solid in our interviews that it could be said that for these schools values and citizenship are inextricably connected. To an extent this explicit connection between citizenship and values accords with the extensive work of the Values Education Study (VES) conducted across Australian schools in the early 2000s (DEST, 2003). However, the strength of the connections raises two important possibilities that require further investigation across a wider sample. For the school leaders and teachers within our sample education for citizenship is viewed as being implicit rather than explicit, and related more to school ethos than to the formal curriculum. Indeed, as reported in the findings, participants felt the formal curriculum needed adapting in only minor ways.

Additionally, none of the schools referred to the list of ten Values of Australian Schooling that were produced as an outcome of the VES, which were posited as core to citizenship and

which were required to be publically displayed in the school. Instead, the schools in our sample had defined *their own school values* in conjunction with their communities, including parents and students, and had arrived at a smaller range of values. While the precise values differed between schools, there was some evidence of what the final VES report cited as a tendency to include ‘values, qualities or behaviours that arguably *emanate from putting particular values into practice*, rather than being values themselves’ alongside clearer *values in themselves* (DEST, 2003: 7). To this end, goals such as “co-operation”, “safety”, and “quality teaching and learning” were reported alongside more traditional values such as “respect”, “caring”, “honesty”, and “integrity”. While the concern raised in the VES report is noted, the key point from our research is that whether conceived as values *per se* or as qualities emanating from putting values into practice, our respondents viewed attributes such as safety and co-operation as important concepts or goals which could shape and determine relationships within the school, and which in turn supported the preparation of active and informed citizens and had been developed by the school community. The schools within our small sample had, then, moved away from nationally formulated values toward smaller sets of locally determined and defined values, but within these did not differentiate between different forms of values education in terms of aims and pedagogies. That this was the case might suggest that participants did not see there to be any significant differences between education for citizenship and forms of values education, such as character education. Given this, we would suggest there is an important need for further research across a wider sample regarding what values are being focused on in schools, how these are formed and expressed, and how (explicitly and implicitly) these connect to citizenship. This recognition is particularly apt at a time of renewed interest in the place and role of schools in promoting “Australian” values and citizenship (Australian Government, 2015a, 2015b; Bergin, 2015) as well as in the context of the recent return to a combined curriculum for humanities and social sciences until Year 7.

The third factor which we would like to draw out of our pilot study relates to the scope and nature of “active citizenship” across the schools. In the first section we alluded to the contested nature of active citizenship and the various interpretations of this within educational approaches – both in theory (McLaughlin, 2000) and practice (Benton et al., 2008). While all of our respondents viewed educating active citizens as central to their work, there was an important sense in which this contestation played out across the schools in our study. Central to this was the locus of student participation *within* their communities. All

schools reported *some* level of engagement with the community outside of the school, but it was only in the country secondary school that these were understood as being extensive and the core of students' community participation. In contrast, in each of the metropolitan primary schools, participation was conceived predominantly in terms of the school community. While participating *within* the school forms an important part of education for citizenship, there is a sense in which this should be extended *beyond* the school gates if students are to understand and relate to their communities (Benton, 2010; ACARA, 2012). The benefits of extending participation was something which our respondents were aware of, but which they found difficult to plan for beyond small and isolated instances, with the exception of the country school for which community learning opportunities were well established. While the findings may suggest a trajectory from school-based participation in the *primary* school to participation in the wider community in the *secondary* school, our findings support those within other contexts which suggest that schools often find the provision of community-based learning problematic. Our findings therefore sit alongside other evidence that there is often an important gap between schools' aspirations for participative programs outside of school and the practical possibilities for this (see, for example, Benton et al., 2008; Pye et al. 2009; Durrant, et al. 2012).

In addition, our findings concerning active citizenship raise another important consideration – particularly in terms of further research. There was a sense in which education for citizenship was approached by schools in a de-politicised way. Notably, while there was mention of learning *about* the Australian political system, there was no real evidence that active citizenship was perceived in the more maximal sense commonly advocated for within the research literature, in which active citizenship is positioned as also concerned with challenging social injustices (see, for example, Crick, 2002; Bickmore, 2014; Hahn, 2015). For example, the schools in our sample viewed active citizenship predominantly in terms of 'good' citizenship, service and volunteering, rather in more political, change-making ways. Related to this, participants made little mention of key – political – motivations underpinning the Melbourne Declaration and the Civics and Citizenship curriculum, including the commitment to social justice and challenging discrimination (aside from one primary school which referred to including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories in their wider curriculum, diversity was either not mentioned or was referred to in terms of celebrating different cultures). In our interviews the view that students are either potential or actual as active, political agents did not find expression as a key dimension of education for

citizenship. As we briefly alluded to in relation to values, given the current political climate and the challenges of social cohesion in contemporary democratic nations, the need to recognise, develop and support students' political engagement in a way which acknowledges their political agency and which engages them in and with difference seems both pressing and to hold positive possibility. It requires, however, forms of community involvement which move beyond service and volunteering, and which are more faithful to the intentions of the Melbourne Declaration.

Finally, in raising the points we have in this discussion it is necessary to note that the sample in our exploratory study did not include an urban secondary school. In comparison to the relatively homogenous country school community, heterogeneous urban environments involve schools working within multiple, and at times not always cohesive, communities – bringing particular and often complex pressures to bear on how schools make provision for students' community involvement. For this reason, while our findings raise issues about how students understand and experience community, socially and emotionally, we recognise that this is an area which again requires further research across a larger sample.

## **Conclusion**

The research presented here represents an initial attempt to start addressing the gap that exists regarding how schools and teachers in Australia today perceive and understand their role as civic educators. For the school leaders and teachers which comprised our sample it is clear that education for citizenship forms a central and defining element of their work. It was notable that the school leaders prefaced this on positive concerns, while teachers tended to view the teaching of knowledge and skills central to education for citizenship as a necessary process in compensating for other socialising processes in students' lives. In a context within which the Values Education Study is now more than ten years old, and within which questions concerning shared Australian values are being raised by a range of issues of public concern, our finding that the schools are making explicit and integral connections between values and education for citizenship is significant and suggests that further, more extensive research regarding values in contemporary Australian schools would be illuminating. Similarly, that the three primary schools in our study depicted community involvement as occurring predominantly within schools raises questions about the extent to which these findings echo practices across other primary schools. Ultimately, however, while the school

leaders and teachers evidenced degrees of similarity and difference with regard to their perceptions and approaches to education for citizenship, one final point is worth reiterating. All of the schools work in a policy context characterised by the range of pressures operating on schools, including those of high-stakes testing. Such pressures place competing demands on teacher time and curriculum space. In this environment, the commitment to the fundamental importance of education for citizenship reported by the school leaders and teachers in our sample is both significant and reassuring.

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